

The Tale of Peter Rabbit
Anna Marie Walters
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The Tale of Peter Rabbit is a children's picture book that has been given the label, Classic. However, does this term still apply to today's generation of children and my group's definition of a classic? Our group decided that the criteria for a children's book to become a classic is: a strong, identifiable lead character, a strong message that the reader can believe, the children's novel should leave a lasting impact on the reader, and lastly, the children's book should be timeless in a sense that the adults whom had read it want to pass it along to future generations.

Peter the rabbit is the main character in the story. After getting a warning from his mother to stay away from Mr. McGregor's garden or he will be caught and eaten like his father Peter decides to venture into the forbidden garden. Is Peter a strong character? Can children identify with him? It is hard to tell because I feel the reader does not get to know Peter on a deeper level. The reader knows that Peter does not listen to his mother and that when faced with danger he almost gives up and he starts to sob, "Peter gave himself up for lost, and shed big tears." If it was not for the birds that come to help him he would have stayed there. Therefore, Peter is not a strong character that is easily identifiable to children because he almost gives up.

The message in the story, however, is stronger and most kids can identify with it. Peter does not listen to his mother (probably most kids at some point do not listen) and lets his curiosity get the better of him. Then Peter almost gets caught and escapes. Then on top of being scared to death, all of the adventures he has while trying to escape give him a cold. When he makes it home his mother only gives him some medicine while, "...Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-tail had bread and milk and blackberries, for supper." Children can identify and relate to the message. It also serves as a tool that parents can use to scare children into following the rules, which plays into our group's fourth trait a classic should have. Adults will want to pass this story on to the next generation because the message holds true to any generation.

I feel that a classic is something that is around for many generations because of its character and message. Even though this book, in my opinion, does not have a strong character the message is strong and children can relate to it. In that sense I do believe that because this book is still around, passed on, and read it does fit my evolving sense of a classic in children's literature.

I feel that the young readers can still relate to this book today. Every child is warned not to do something and they learn that if you don't listen then bad consequences will occur. However, I feel there are challenges that this book may face. Children today are more familiar with witty and stronger main characters like Clifford, SpongeBob, and

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Diego. The illustrations in these books are also more eye-catching and draw the children in more.

However, I still feel that The Tale of Peter the Rabbit is still a classic even though the character is not as strong as other books and the illustrations may not be as appealing as other books today. The main reason I feel it is a classic because the message is strong and leaves a lasting impact on reader more than a Diego or SpongeBob book. I also feel that adults will most likely pass on The Tale of Peter Rabbit before they pass on the other books.

How was The Tale of Peter the Rabbit even chosen as a classic for children's literature to begin with? Who gets to decide what a classic is and what is not a classic? This may sound unlikely, but I feel the readers choose what a classic is. Whether you are an adult or a child reading a book for the first time and after you are done reading it you want to share it with someone else creates a snowball effect. If there are enough readers that choose to pass the book along then it has an impact on if they book is considered a classic. But to get a reader to pass on the book to another reader the children's book must have a strong character, a strong message, and leave an impact on the reader. However, I do feel that the media and publishing companies play an important role too. They could push a book on readers and make them believe that this book is "good" and must be read. Yet, I believe the readers have the most impact in determining a classic by keeping it alive from generation to generation.

Are there any absolute classics of children's literature? I know that there are some books that I will not pass on to my children because I did not connect with the lead character or message but they are still considered a classic. Yet, there are others that will take that same book and pass it on. Then there are books that are not considered classics that I will pass on to my children because I enjoyed them. In my eyes, Harry Potter is a classic and I believe 100 years from now it will still be read and enjoyed. So, I feel that a classic is only a matter of an opinion that most people share making the pass it on, thus making it timeless.